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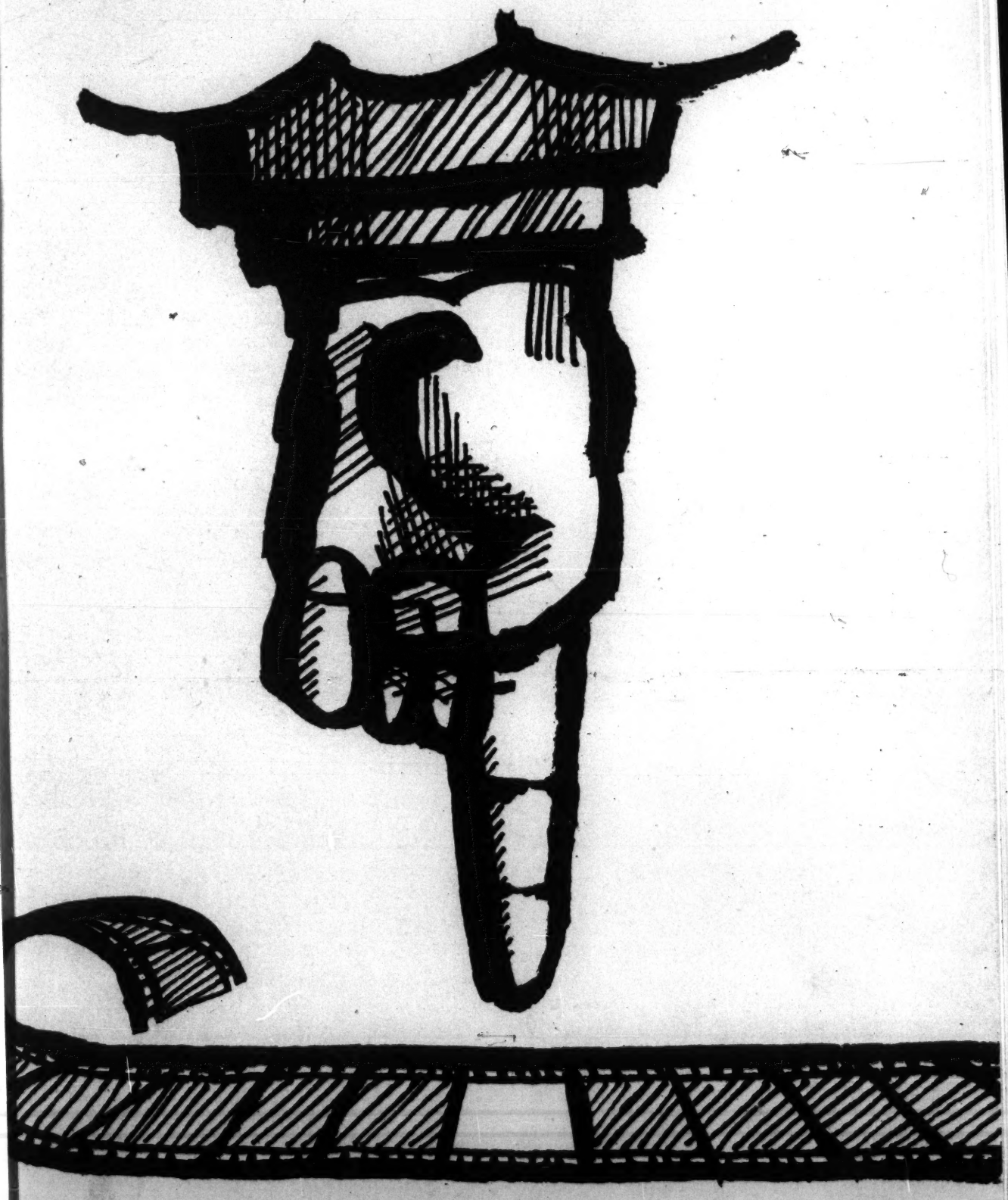

quarterly journal of film criticism

Definition

QUARTERLY JOURNAL OF FILM CRITICISM

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In Default of a Manifesto

Why do we choose the present moment to bring out a new magazine of film criticism?

It is difficult to credit that more than three years have passed since Lindsay Anderson's article "Stand up! Stand up!", appearing in "Sight and Sound", gave first coherent voice to the need for a higher level of responsibility among critics. Since then the cry has been repeated, the thesis elaborated and the case restated with increasing showmanship; so that those who began as isolated prophets can now find reward in the satisfactions of preaching to the converted. But criticism has not noticably changed. An obvious reason for the apparent failure of this agitation is that the existing magazines, having established their styles and secured their public, see no reason to undergo a sudden transformation in order to satisfy a demand which may be ephemeral, which may not exist at all, and whose magnitude in any case cannot be assessed.

Yet it is our belief—a belief based upon the tenor of conversation among friends and upon the enthusiastic response to the Forums organized by the Joint Council for Education through Art—that a public does exist for a criticism substantially different from that which is at present practised, and that the writers of this criticism will come into being once a platform is placed at their disposal. We may be proved wrong. In that case we shall close down. But meanwhile we offer the pages of "Definition" to any critic who is prepared to devote to films the same analytical study as it is customary to devote to literature or painting, and who is not scared to assess their implications from a responsible human standpoint. We have, however, virtually no tradition behind us.

We shall not dogmatize about the character of the new criticism. This remains to be created, perhaps by writers at present unknown. A few random comments will suffice to outline our editorial position.

The widespread impatience with current standards of criticism is admirable. We share it. But impatience is not constructive: and it seems doubtful to us whether standards can be raised—in a vacuum, as it were—simply by a well-intentioned impulse towards greater responsibility. It is when we stop to ask ourselves exactly what we m e a n by "standards" that the uncertainties present themselves.

Mr. David Sylvester suggests that we establish a pantheon of works acknowledged to be masterpieces which could serve as shrines for our critical standards. Yet it is hard to see that such a pantheon could be of any real use except as a basis for purely technical comparisons; and since every true work of art is a unique statement in which technique and subject are indissolubly wedded, such comparisons would be of little worth. Clearly it would be a good thing if, for example, Sjostrom and Dreyer were more highly

regarded than Griffith and Huston; but such a balance of judgement would seem to represent the consequence rather than the pre-requisite of a healthy criticism.

What we mean by "standards" is surely nothing that can be tabulated, but rather a general approach—a willingness to assess in detail the social and moral content of a film by analysing the impact it makes upon us. And such analysis presupposes a clear conception of the way the film medium works—i.e. an aesthetic. While films are discussed as if they were novels or (more usually) plays, commitment will remain an unrealizable dream.

Many factors conspire to discourage the emergence of a vigorous aesthetic for film. One is the dominance of the practice of reviewing, resulting from the transitory character of distribution and the fact that the reader has no guarantee of access to films which have completed their circuit run. Another is the dominance of the historical approach—resulting from the youth of the medium—by which films are valued purely on the basis of the contribution they have made to the t e c h n i q u e of the cinema. Hence trivialization in the one sphere, and art-for-art's-sake in the other. But perhaps the most devitalizing influence of all is a deep mistrust of theory, which can be traced partly to the tradition of English empiricism and partly to that affected anti-intelectualism which a popular art is thought to demand of its advocates.

But a credible and fruitful theory will not be created overnight like the star of Bethlehem to guide us. It will emerge, we believe, only from the persistent practice of criticism which is not ashamed of itself. Thus we are referred once more to the lack of a tradition. This does not mean that we are faced with a vicious circle. It simply means that the problem must be approached from all points simultaneously if we are to realize the vision of a criticism combining the exactness of mathematics with the urgency of a fire alarm.

U.L.R. 7 provides an example of the limitations of intelligent present-day criticism in its juxtaposition of two comments on "Ashes and Diamonds"—one by Rod Prince, the other by Alan Lovell. Both men are socialists, and might be expected to share certain basic values: yet Mr. Prince sees in the film "hope and the vision of a better future", whilst Mr. Lovell finds it infused with romantic defeatism. To set these reviews side by side is to reveal! that neither is much more than an informed personal impression. What are the differences in attitude, in presuppositions, in general view of life which can elicit such conflicting responses to a single film? It is with questions of this sort that criticism must b e g i n.

The editors of "Definition"—ourselves ex-students of the London School of Film Technique—would like to thank those students, ex-students and members of the School staff whose donations have made it possible for us to launch the magazine. We hope that future issues will see an improvement not only in content but also in size, quality of paper and general finish. We see "Definition" not as an organized crusade by a group of self-confident writers, but as a modest attempt to satisfy a need. Whether we achieve this will depend upon our contributors. But a necessary condition for it is that the magazine should survive. We therefore appeal to all those who accept our premises to support the magazine by donations, subscriptions and/or simply buying it.

Towards a Theory

by

DAI VAUGHAN

I shall attempt in this article to elaborate some of the points made in our first editorial—in particular the idea that lack of a general theory deprives us of the basis for responsible judgements no matter how sincere we may be. In subsequent articles we hope to discuss the relevance of such theory to the notion of commitment, and its implications in the realm of film production.

It is our contention that resposibility is not so simple a matter as it has often been made to seem—that a social and human attitude, worked out in all sincerity and applied as a touchstone of criticism, will not lead to responsible judgements unless the mechanisms of the medium are understood. Thus in **"Preface to Film"** Raymond Williams—an eminently responsible writer—has drawn from a basic fallacy a chaos of misunderstanding. His arguments will provide a clear example of what we mean.

Mr. Williams' thesis is that film is a branch of drama. He points to the diversity of forms which drama has assumed in the past, and to the consequent difficulty of framing any definition that will apply in all cases. This justifies him in defining drama by certain minimal properties: namely, that it involves the elements of performance and of imitation (the latter to distinguish it from recitals of verse, etc.). Since film for the most part also involves these elements he considers his thesis proved—although this position obliges him to dismiss documentary as a sort of hybrid between film proper and mere cinematographic record. Having established that film is a form of drama Mr. Williams is free to ignore, or to regard as incidental, those properties in which the film medium differs—to my mind radically—from anything the word "drama" would normally convey.

His next move is to equate the "naturalistic" cinema of Pudovkin and de Sica with the "naturalistic" theatre of Strindberg and Stanislavsky, and to attack the former by exposing the limitations of the latter. The argument is briefly as follows. Naturalistic drama seeks to complement or even replace a superficial realism of decor by a psychological realism on the part of the actor. Acting must not be calculated for external effect, but must arise naturally from states of feeling generated by the actor from within. The words of the playwright are therefore seen only as a reflection of the character's state of mind. It is the actor's job to penetrate this state of mind from the slim evidence given in the text, and to interpret it in its wholeness through his performance. But in reality some of the most complex states of mind find "expression" in complete impassivity: thus naturalism ends in a blind alley, since it supplies no dramatic equivalent by which these states can be portrayed. Transferring this problem into the cinema, Mr. Williams offers as a solution the development of a new expressionism similar in kind to that of the German school of the 1920's. The more obvious solution—that films should place less of the onus of expression upon actors—can hardly suggest itself when we have started from the assumption that film is a branch of

drama. (Presumably **"Sang des Bêtes"**, **"Listen to Britain"** and **"October"** are not really films at all.)

It is a pity that Mr. Williams has put so many valuable comments on the theatre into a book on the cinema. Any conclusions based on his analysis could hardly fail to be wrong. What, then, are those characteristic properties of the film medium which the above arguments leave out of account?

A great deal is said nowadays about "poetic cinema", as if this were a separate genre. It is my belief that the structure of film is essentially poetic, and that any film which is true to the nature of the medium will possess, automatically, that quality we recognize as screen poetry. The basic element of this poetry is the screeen image as an integrated unit. This does not mean that shots should be composed as if they were still photographs, or that rapid cutting with static set-ups is more cinematic than a fluid camera technique. Complexity of composition is a matter of personal style; and the moving camera simply provides a continuous change of image instead of an abrupt one (an advantage of this being the ability to make a point "in passing") * What it does mean is that the protagonists in the action should not appear as actors photographed within a setting, but should participate in their setting on the same level of reality—whether this be the reality of the everyday world, as in **"Bicycle Thieves"**, or that of the personal screen worlds of Cocteau or Clair. The montage sum of these images is the concrete expression of man in a given situation.

This is true even in those films—documentaries, perhaps—where no individual is faced with a crisis or choice (the moment of choice being the point around which our situation appears to crystallize—the point of sharpest awareness). Here the situation is presented in a more obviously direct way to the viewer, through an organization of elements from life which refers us to certain values; and our response to the film depends on the significance we attach to the elements selected and our willingness to accept the values which their organization seems to proffer. Thus **"Les Charmes de L'Existence"** explores and interprets the attitude to life implicit in the work of the 19th century French salon painters, and we react with a mingled nostalgia and contempt which characterize the film as satire—though the painters themselves might have missed the joke. Likewise **"We Are the Lambeth Boys"** reveals a particular aspect of our present social situation — the relation of young people to their work and leisure; and only those who cannot accept the implications of its muted optimism will complain because the darker side of these youngsters' life has been omitted.

Photography is a convention we accept as truth. Certainly expression can be achieved through lighting; but this is an effect practised upon the thing photographed, and does not in any way diminish our sense of the photographic process as a trustworthy intermediary between ourselves and what was before camera. This being so, the film has a special propensity for capturing images from ordinary life and for creating its screen-worlds from such elements—i.e. for realism. But to equate the actor in this realism with the actor in the naturalistic theatre is mistaken.

In the theatre, as I understand it, the actor's function is to **communicate** the states of feeling underlying the words: so that here the **reductio ad absurdum** of the impassive face is a cogent criticism of the naturalistic mode. But in the cinema this is not so. Here the function of the actor is to be as real—as true to the situation—as the concrete objects which surround him: and if an impassive face is really the appropriate response to

a given situation, then it is of no consequence whether this is achieved by a skilled actor applying Stanislavsky's method or by a non-actor doing nothing. This does not mean that there is no place for the professional actor in films. Clearly there are many subtleties of emotional response which—unless the director is a de Sica—only the professional can render adequately. But there is a very real sense in which it is true to say that the function of the film actor is to be adequate rather than to express.

The primary concern of the film is not to provide insights into states of mind or feeling, but to reveal a situation in its human starkness. It would be absurd to claim that in **"Bicycle Thieves"** we knew the exact thoughts and feelings of the father in the few moments before he commits the theft. We do not need to know. It is sufficient that we sympathize with the position of a man driven by adversity to transgress the ethical principles which are second nature to him. Again, at the end of **"Day of Wrath"** we have a long, sustained close-up of Anne. The acting is convincing; but it gives us no details of what is going on in her mind. The purpose of the shot is simply to hold us with the tragedy that has happened, fixing our gaze on the face of a woman betrayed by her lover into betraying her own soul. (I can think of no equivalent of this in any other art form.)

We are not here disparaging theatre—only pointing out that cinema is different. In the theatre the main agents of expression are the words spoken and the gestures of the actors accompanying them. In a film like **"Day of Wrath"**, however, the words carry little dramatic weight in themselves; they serve rather as signposts to the relations between characters. Perhaps we have scarcely yet realized (except in the practice of Bresson) the full implications of Kuleshov's notorious experiment in which, by intercutting shots of a plate of soup, a child playing and a dead woman with the **same close-up** of Mosjukine, he convinced viewers that Mosjukine was expressing hunger, delight and sorrow respectively. It is clear that Mosjukine was not **acting** hunger. What was achieved was a poetic **statement** of hunger—not as a feeling, but as a relation between man and food.

In a play about a carpenter an actor might go through the motions of planing a piece of wood; but this would simply be to provide a realistic setting for realistic dialogue. In the cinema we could have the silent concentration of the craftsman on his work (in close-up), the sound of the plane licking through the plank and—from the man's viewpoint—the slivers of fresh wood curling out from the top of it. This relation between the man and his work might, in fact, provide the subject of the whole film. ("Only a documentary"? Perhaps. But had it not been for the practice of adapting literary best-sellers for the screen—a practice dating back beyond the Film d'Art of 1909—the distinction between feature and documentary might never have appeared as clear-cut as it does today.) Film is an art of situation—of man in relation to his environment and to other men—and its emphasis is not psychological but moral. It is therefore the appropriate medium for an age which is beginning to recognize the sterility of psychological analysis as a source of guidance to men.

The above comments represent—inevitably—my own view of the cinema. But perhaps they will serve to demonstrate that a credible theory is necessary as a basis for any sanely committed criticism. Since we have no tradition of film criticism in this country, such a theory has yet to be properly worked out.

If theory stands in such danger of producing ludicrous results, then why bother to evolve one? One answer, of course, is that no theory should be

applied so rigidly as to exclude fresh insights. But the main point is that **any** criticism assumes an aesthetic, even though this aesthetic may not be made conscious or explicit. And when it is not made conscious and explicit it can, if faulty, cause untold havoc, since the pretence is that no aesthetic is employed at all and we are therefore deterred from proposing an alternative to it. The real danger in what David Robinson has called the "check-list system" of reviewing—awarding points for script, driection, acting, photography, editing—is that it takes for granted an aesthetic appropriate to the theatre, in which actors **play** parts **against** a background to the **accompaniment** of music, and these elements can therefore be split "horizontally". Thus instead of beginning with the total impact of a work and then analysing this impact into its constituents, the reviewer seeks to dissect the work mechanically by cutting it across the grain.

After a showing of **"Odd Man Out"** a friend of mine, commenting on the acting, said, "Of course, Mason didn't have much of a part to get his teeth into." Here was a figure created by the full resources of cinema—vocal intonation, lighting, gesture, camera angle: yet by viewing it as a "part" to be "performed" my friend had blinded himself to all the tragic grandeur of the resultant image.

It is only too easy to see the attraction of such a system for the reviewer. The conditions under which he works, writing hurriedly about a film he has seen only once, do not encourage deep analysis—or, for that matter, discrimination. A further problem confronting him is that he is obliged to pass comment on a film regardless of whether he responds to it any way. This leads to a vague sort of opinionizing—the manufacturing of views—which again sets a premium upon the slick formula. What is worse is that in cinema the review, instead of being a journalistic sub-branch of criticism proper, has become, because of the nature of film distribution, the predominant form.

It will be apparent that the aesthetic I have delineated has its roots in Eisenstein; and this will be enough to damn it for many people. One source of mistrust for Eisenstein's theory is that it has been taken, quite unnecessarily, to imply a narrow one-idea-per-shot technique, and hence to be applicable only to the silent film where manipulation of images had to assume many of the duties of sound—i.e. to become a language. Another source of mistrust is the mere fact that it **is** theory, which is said to have no business in the arts. It is often suggested, in tones of veiled disapprobation, that Eisenstein's montage analyses of his sequences were thought up only after the event, and were therefore not truly the theories **on which** the sequences were based. But this is nonsense. No-one would claim—least of all Eisenstein—that works of art could be built up **from** theory in the way that a physicist will derive a complex formula from first principles. Theory is an apparatus of critical analysis; and obviously such theory must be distilled from a consideration, in retrospect, of the structure of works of art and the way they have affected us. Whether or not an artist feels the need of theory as an aid to that self-critical feed-back which is a complement to all creative effort will depend on his temperament. His critical awareness will manifest itself, perhaps unconsciously, in the gradual shaping of his work. But the man whose work **is** criticism cannot afford to neglect it.

DAI VAUGHAN

* One thinks of the three coffins in the execution sequence in *Paths of Glory*.

JIMMY PORTER AND THE TWO-AND-NINES

by

STUART HALL

Look Back In Anger is a better film that most, and certainly one of the outstanding — and rare — achievements of the British cinema in its years of dearth. That is not, as the film critic of **What On in London,** Mr. Maurice Speed. would have us believe, because it is "realistic, cynical, brutal", or even because it is "technically superb". Indeed, the film's weakness is that it strains at certain points towards a realism which it does not achieve (for example, the sequences in the jazz club and in the market): its cynicism—or more accurately, the bitter anger of its protagonist—is counterpointed, (particularly in the final sequence in the railway station), by a certain sentimentality: and its brutality (altogether the wrong word for Jimmy Porter's complex response to his world) is largely unexplained. Technically, the film is good, and occasionally inspired: but it shows at many points the inexperience of Tony Richardson in the cinema, and his failure to effect the proper translation of the text from dramatic to cinematic terms.

It is not nearly in the same range of achievement as **Room At The Top.** And since this is the comparsion which **Look Back** immediately invites, it is important to say why this is so. The central difference, I believe, is that **Room At The Top** achieves and maintains a sense of **place,** giving the plot a social and physical context, which **Look Back** does not possess. Whether this is due to the fact that Jack Clayton was working from a novel, where the context is itself developed, whereas Richardson was working from a play, where the context of the action can only be symbolically and verbally referred to, is difficult to tell. Certainly one or two young people sitting near me at **Look Back.** who were unfamiliar with the play, found it difficult to understand what it was about, why Jimmy was angry, and so on.

As Alan Lovell has pointed out in his review of the film in **Universities and Left Review 7, Look Back In Anger** as a play presented certain deep problems of translation into cinematic terms which Jack Clayton could not have encountered with **Room At The Top.** There is no place in the play for the descriptions which John Braine worked out for Warley and Dufton: there is no place for the incidental shafts of character-portrait which create, in the novel, the feel and character of the provincial town. The social references in **Look Back** are contained in Jimmy's long speeches: the subsidiary characters which John Braine was able to introduce into his novel have existence in **Look Back** only as characterisations in Jimmy's monologues, as satirical caricatures, viciously drawn in Porter's bitter-sweet style: Alison's brother, her upper-class friends, Mamma. Whereas **Room At The Top** contains within it, as a central theme, the contrast between Dufton and Warley, **Look Back is** contained within Jimmy Porter's bloody little room. That strip of no-man's-land between Jimmy's

...a certain sentimentality

self-consuming rage and Alison's pusilanimity which Cliff inhabits is not a "place" at all: it is one of the lower quarterdecks of Jimmy Porter's inferno. Tony Richardson failed to capture the symbolic contrast between the Porter closet and the wide world of the street and market, so that Jimmy's room is just a room: and there is none of the careful exploration of this room by the camera which Clayton allowed for when he was shooting the borrowed flat where Joe Lampton and Alice secretly met. I can still recall the details of that borrowed flat, the old Victorian bed, the flapping gauze curtains, the little kitchenette on an upper level where Alice stood as Joe flounced out. I cannot really visualise at all the Porter cubby-hole, though for the purposes of **Look Back,** the flat is more important.

A related question is the problem of the play's social framework: **why** is Jimmy angry and what is he angry **about?** Now the weakness of the film in this respect relates to the weakness of the play. But this is too simple an answer. Part of the point of **Look Back In Anger** is that Jimmy Porter is not fully aware of what bites him: he dramatises the confusion and conflicts of his time, and the play itself depends upon the discrepancy between Jimmy's concentrated fury and the scattered targets at which his anger is directed. That is why Alison is so crucial to the play: because Jimmy's rage is able to focus upon the central point of tension — the figure and fact of Alison. She becomes for him the embodiment of their society, so that the breakup of their marriage and the disintegration of Jimmy's world proceed together. The sexual and human relationship between Jimmy and Alison is a metaphor for the social relationship between Jimmy and the world. That is why the critics who found Jimmy Porter's raging against society too strong for their tastes were obliged to retreat from the

play itself, and look at only one half of the case: "Jimmy's all very well, but he's a perfect beast to his wife". Amen.

The film does not draw these parallels carefully enough. The relationship between Jimmy and Alison is alrceady at breaking point when the film opens. And since a great deal of the substance has been cut from Jimmy's speeches, the insistent flow of his monologues broken up into acceptable staccato bursts, the whole range of his social references have been lost. The film therefore **almost** asks to be interpreted as a lover's quarrel: and, as such, it is a strange lover's quarrel indeed.

I said almost: but not entirely. Something has been done to correct this in the film — some of Jimmy's more explicit references to class have been replaced by the episode with the coloured stall-keeper in the market, and Jimmy's fight on his behalf. But this dies not seem to me to be a successful transposition. The whole business of Alison's family, Mum in her union-jack covered trunk, Dad in his Indian twilight, brother submerged by platitudes and the world suffused by hypocrisy — these things are the centre and justification for the play. They run through Jimmy's dialogue on the stage at every point. In the film, they tend to be hived off to the sequences in the market. They become episodes in the life of Jimmy Porter, rather than bits and pieces of Jimmy Porter himself. In the play Jimmy is being socially crucified: in the film he is seen to be suffering, at some poignant moments, on another's behalf. The play comes alive because it is about the human stupidities and absurdities of class: it contains potent if unpoliticised political feelings. The film underplays this element, and replaces it — through the episode with the coloured boy — with rather looser, humane feelings — just and right in themselves — but somehow unintegrated into the larger pattern of the plot.

Then there is the question of Richard Burton. Burton is an extremely fine and controlled actor: but he is altogether too sure, disciplined and certain for Jimmy Porter. There are none of the uncertainties, which the role requires, in his playing. This is not a matter of Burton's understanding of the part — but a criticism of the casting ,and beyond that, of the parlous condition of the acting profession. The fact is that a whole social generation has come into being — "the scholarship boy", for want of a better term (a loose term, which covers the fact that Jimmy Porter was probably lower-middle class and Joe Lampton didn't go to university!) — which cannot find adequate dramatic representation on the screen. The young men and women who have been through these experiences them-selves have passed through the wringers of the dramatic school and come out the other side refurbished, with their accents straight and their manners refined. If we need a young teen-ager for the screen, we have Andrew Ray: than whom, of course, a nicer English boy could not be found, but... Both Lawrence Harvey and Richard Burton do their best with Joe Lampton and Jimmy Porter. But Harvey was too sophisticated for Joe, his Yorkshire accent heavy with that Old Vic burr; and the inner tensions of Lampton's divided allegiances were never caught in **Room At The Top.** And Burton was altogether too Shakespearean for Jimmy. Of course Jimmy is partly a ham Hamlet, an amateur Lear "more sinned against than sinning". The trouble is that Burton was too obviously a **professional** Hamlet, and couldn't for the life of him get that rich, sonorous, to-be-or-not-to-be out of his voice. This is a pretty pass indeed, for without the actors,

how is life ever to get on to the stage and screen at all? There is, of course, Kenneth Haig, whose first Jimmy Porter at the Royal Court was the finest portrayal to date. There is also the box office, star ratings, — and crazy, soaring budgets.

II

Every day I pass that still of Richard Burton, poised above a timorous Mary Ure on a broad, suggestive bed, which was used as advertising to boost the film. The still of course is, in dramatic terms. a lie: the film is **not** about sex-and-love life of the James. T. Porters, and the occasions when Jimmy threatens to bash Alison over the head far outweigh and outnumber the tight clinches. But why worry about such a little thing as artistic truth?

Artistic truth did not concern some of the cinema critics either. The **Evening Standard,** playing it straighter on this occasion that is often the case, used the bedroom still, but acknowledged the theme: "a truce in the class warfare. Participants: Richard Burton and Mary Ure". Not so for the **Evening News.** In a dazzling display of root prejudices which would have delighted Cliff and Jimmy, Mr Jympson Harman enlisted the support of the masses ("What will they say in the two-and-nines?") for his denunciation of the film. "Being angry is a childish prerogative"... "Nowadays the process is prolonged — among schoolboys who must not be caned, Teddy boys who cannot be blamed for their sins, and literary and dramatic blokes who make fortunes out of insisting that life stinks."

Mr Harman's critical procedure I find fascinating. His first job is to enlist the so-called sympathy of the philistines by playing upon the anti-intellectual prejudices of the "two-and-nines". (Here are the intelectuals again, Mrs Brown — he seems to be saying — giving you all that high-brow stuff about class and injustice and life: now we're all against that aren't we, Mrs Brown? and the film critics are solidly in there punching for you too.) Then the dismissal of the theme — "childish"... "infant disagreement with things as they are"... "four such valiant souls set their personal views against those of the common herd" (personal views: God Forbid!): and, in case the full social dangers of "setting personal views against those of the common herd" does not elicit sufficiently strong a response, the film must be entwined with other stock responses... "schoolboys who must not be caned"... "Teddy boys who cannot be blamed" (Teddy boys: worth its emotive weight in gold, that one)... "literary blokes who make fortunes"... "infant disagreements"... which fail to disappear "with the onset of adolescence". Verdict: bad?

No — Mr Harman is more sophisticated than that. "This is a very good film, with many welcome touches of freshness..." What then is wrong? "Alas! the average cinemagoer has little or no appreciation of quality, and he has frequently and severely shown that he resents pessimism in movies."

A metaphor for a social relationship

That is Mr Harman's final justification. The two-and-nines won't like it — and everybody knows that the job of the critic is to confirm people in their stock responses, to pass back to them as critical judgments the tastes formed through ten continuous years' viewing of the productions of the British cinema industry.

Mr Harman's remedy is in line with that of the Prime Minister's: "Will success spur them on to a more mature and optimistic view of life? I hope so. Success usually does that." Just wait. in other words, until John Osborne hasn't had it so good. We'll squeeze an **Im All Right Jack** out of him yet.

It would be comforting to think that Jimmy had done well by the "posh" papers. The **Times,** in fact, is both reasonable and cool: its review survives such off-hand throwaways as "class distinctions... are, indeed, to the natives a cross between a hobby and a grievance, something like Test matches and the weather" (referring to **Room At The Top)** to become a decent if detached piece of brief criticism. The **Times** critic recognises that Tony Richardson surmounts one or two rough passages "by putting down the loud pedal"; though in fact, what is wrong with the jazz sequence, with which the film opens, is **not** its loudness but the sentimental and idealised nature of its conception. It is altogether wrong for Jimmy to be the skilful, central performer at the local club, commanding the undivided attention and adoring watchful gaze of Cliff and others: it is far to stereotyped an opening, touching the fringes of bad Hollywood musical films, and it sets Jimmy **up** rather than **apart.** The false note here is not Jimmy's or Burton's but the director's: a badly conceived scene, which contrasts, in its awkward-

ness, with the beautifully judged direction (and acting) of Dame Edith Evans as Ma Tanner, and Richardson's fine composition of the scene between herself and Jimmy at the grave.

In contrast with the **Times** review, the **Observer** notice is lost, once again, in the delicate web of Miss Lejeune's reminiscences. It is all very well to play around with Burton's "Shakespearean" deliveries, comparing them gracefully with Robert Donat's fondness for "spouting the purplest passages from Shakespeare against the clanging background of the trams". But is there a moment left (or indeed an inch of type) for a doubt as to whether Shakespearean declamations are, after all, what's wanted for Jimmy Porter? The performance, the ring of the voice cannot be separated here from what is being said. If Jimmy's speches can be confused with the desire "to shout powerful words and make a jolly noise", then there is something seriously wrong: for it is perfectly plain that Jimmy's verbal arrows, though loosed too freely, are intended for **some** target — and one has only to recall the concentrated counter-reaction which ran through the Royal Court stalls to remember that some of those targets **were** hit, in places where it hurt. Only the sane judgements of Mr Derek Prouse in the **Sunday Times** saved the day — a review which pays tribute where it is due, and which recognises in its closing phrase — ("it all depends on how you react to Jimmy Porter") — that attitudes and values **have** been called into question here, and that the film cannot be shuffled off without dealing, however briefly, with its social content.

The critics have a great deal to answer for where John Osborne is concerned. Faulty as **Paul Slickey** was, we ought not to forget that Fleet Street killed it off in three or four weeks and that somebody has kept **The Mousetrap** going since the Ice Age receded. The profession is a serious one, and a responsible one — particularly where the pertinent questions which **Look Back** raises in our minds are concerned. The critics are also going to be at least partly responsible for a "British cinema revival" — if we ever have one. If the revival comes, bits and pieces of **Look Back in Anger** are going to count. That being so, decent and responsible, but critical, treatment of the film and Tony Richardson's direction may well turn out to be a blow for freedom.

STUART HALL

PLUS CA CHANGE . . .

"ONE day, when we have forgotten the word 'international' and its minor and conflicting echo 'national'—made harmonious by that singular line of reasoning adopted in the Street of Films, we shall make a great picture."

Hugh Castle in "Close Up"—March 1929.

Complacent Rebel

A RE-EVALUATION OF THE WORK OF ROBERT FLAHERTY

by

DAI VAUGHAN

I.

Robert Flaherty's reputation is a fairly stable one. The assessment of his work by such writers as Grierson and Rotha in the '30s has passed into common currency and has never, sofar as I know, been seriously challenged. This assessment consists mainly of admiration for Flaherty's craftsmanship, for his sympathy in the handling and observation of people, for his out-and-out rejection of studio artificiality and for his stubborn refusal to be corrupted by Hollywood. It is tempered by certain reservations as to the social value of his films in the context of the modern world. No-one will suggest that this view of Flaherty is wildly mistaken; but maybe we should examine it a little more closely before accepting it as definitive. Let us consider first the director's undisputed merits.

Flaherty began **"Nanook of the North"**, his earliest extant film, in 1920, impelled by the feeling that he had failed in a previous attempt to film the Eskimos. His reasons for his dissatisfaction are illuminating. He says:

> ". . . . we showed the print a good deal — at the American Geographic Society, at the Explorers' Club in New York, and to friends at our home in New Canaan, Connecticut. People were polite, but I could see that the interest they took in the film was the friendly one of wanting to see where **I** had been and what **I** had done. That wasn't what I wanted at all. I wanted to show the Innuit [Eskimos]. And I wanted to show them, not from the civilized point of view, but as they saw themselves, as "we, the people." I realized then that I must go to work in an entirely different way."

This way consisted in living with the Eskimos; in sharing their experiences and their hardships; in filming not those aspects of their lives which might seem the most extraordinary, but the typical and everyday details; and finally in compiling the film in such a manner that these details would occupy in it the same position as they occupied in the lives of the people themselves. To the method crystallized in the making of **"Nanook"** Flaherty remained faithful in his subsequent films, resisting as best he could the pressures of those whose sole concern is to exploit anything and everything to the maximum commercial advantage. He learned to approach his subject-matter with humility, respecting the ways of life of the people he was

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filming and refusing to subordinate these to any fanciful story or pre-conceived plan. It is therefore easy to understand the appeal of his work to the British documentarists of the '30s: for they were themselves engaged in a violent battle against falsity (a battle which, though on a different front, is still being fought today); and his example offered proof that the cine-camera could be used to explore the real world, and not just to record the empty confections of stars and script-department hacks.

It is worth stressing that Flatherty's realism derived primarily from an attitude towards people — and not, as with Dziga-Vertov, from an attitude towards the film medium as such. Whilst Vertov believed in catching life unawares — or apparently unawares — and then editing his material into a visual commentary upon the subject in hand, Flaherty had no objection to staging elaborate incidents (e.g. the shark-hunt in **"Man of Aran"**) in order to create the effects he required. Most of the episodes in his films were consciously acted; and Nanook, for instance, had to undertake the tricky job of building an igloo large enough to accommodate the shooting of the interior scenes. But everything that was done was authentic — the reconstruction of a more or less simple item in the daily routine. Thus in **"Moana"** we are shown food being prepared, fish being caught, fabrics being decorated with traditional designs: all in readiness for the ceremony of a youth's initiation into manhood through the ordeal of tattooing. The film suffers from countless technical faults — bad framing, faulty continuity, jerky camera movement and weak editing — and has relatively few of those "spontaneous" gestures which can give an air of human warmth to the driest industrial documentary: yet we are made to love its people.

Such were Flaherty's positive achievements. He was hailed as the father of documentary, and his work — along with that of Dziga-Vertov — provides one of the two basic currents which have run through the whole course of realist film-making. The principles which he was the first to evolve — absorb the way of life of the people, and allow the structure of the film to emerge naturally from the pattern of this life — have been fundamental to Italian and Indian neo-realism. They have also informed such isolated films as **"Menschen am Sonntag"**, and have to a lesser extent influenced the British Documentary and Free Cinema movements.

But it is apparent that admiration for Flaherty rests more upon his approach to film-making than upon his films.

Adverse criticism, on the other hand, is usually made in social terms, so that we endorse or reject it according to our political outlook. It is surely not sufficient for Rotha to say, "his understanding of actuality is a sentimental reaction towards the past, an escape into a world that has little contemporary significance, a placing of sentimentalism above the more urgent claims of materialism." We all know of films about the past which are of great contemporary significance, and of ethnographic films (such as **"La Forêt Sacrée"**) which we feel give us a valuable insight into a remote but nevertheless deeply human sector of experience. Such significance and experience are perhaps lacking in Flaherty's work; but adjectives like "sentimental" do little to tell us why. Again, when Rotha says that in each of the locations Flaherty has chosen there have existed social problems from which he has turned away, it is clear that the judgment is based upon criteria external to the films themselves. So between enthusiasm for his

methods and censure for his omissions these films escape almost untouched by criticism.

It may be argued that omission is a form of distortion, and that to cite these omissions is to expose a devitation from reality. Certainly even Flaherty, for all his humility, brings interpretation to bear upon his subject-matter; and what he finds is influenced by what he is looking for. But the "truth" of art is not truth in the sense in which a proposition can be true or false: it is not a relation between statement and reality. The truth of a work of art is rather the combination to the lock — that complex of attitudes and values in the light of which the work falls into place as a coherent whole. If we are inclined to apply to a work such terms as "incomplete", "sentimental" or "escapist" it is because we find these attitudes unacceptable or the values false. And it is from this point that criticism must begin.

II

Grierson finds Flatherty's films an expression of neo-Rousseauism — of a wish to return us to the primitive condition. But this view seems a little unjust. For it is clear from what we know of Flaherty's life that he did not fully turn his back on civilization; and this impression will be confirmed by a glance at his output. He was willing to make **"Industrial Britain"** for the Empire Marketing Board. In **"Louisiana Story"** he showed as much admiration for the courage of the engineers facing the dangers of oil drilling as he had shown for that of the Eskimo struggling against the hostilities of nature. And Richard Griffith says of his unpublished film **"The Land"**, made for the U.S. government during the agricultural crisis of the late '30s, "He felt involved in the tragic problem, and the solution through an imaginative use of machines was one in which he truly believed."

It must be admitted, however, that other critics have drawn the opposite conclusion from **"The Land"**: and in fact it is a very perplexing film. The early part deals eloquently with the ravages of soil erosion due to merciless overcultivation and unplanned farming. We see pitiful shreds of turf left clinging to the hillsides, buildings derelict on what was once good farmland, and bedraggled families, who have left their homes with a cartful of possessions, now starving for want of work. But, we are told, there is another enemy — more powerful than soil erosion. It is the machine. Farmers are driven from land that is still fertile because they cannot compete commercially with large-scale mechanized agriculture; while machines everywhere replace human hands and swell the aimless migration of labour. Men are packed like cattle into trucks to work one or two days a week at the fruit harvest, and are grateful for it. Abundance has brought poverty. We see the empty stares of those whose livelihood has been snatched from them without recompense. And the machines — bulldozers, reapers and cotton-pickers — are so photographed as to resemble some crawling menace from outer space.

Yet to my mind there is nothing in the indignation of these sequences, or in the quietly suppressed hatred of Flaherty's own voice reading the commentary, that is not justified by the happenings of the time. These were the consequences of mechanization in a particular society: and the verbal image of stevedores drowned like rats in a flood of golden wheat remains succinct and legitimate. What is significant is Flaherty's recognition that new circumstances demand new modes of organization, and that the old modes, however satisfactory in their day, will no longer suffice. Farmers come together to discuss co-ordinated action; and there is repeated reference to "problems which no man can now solve alone." Finally we are promised that the land will yield riches beyond our imagining when we have learned to master "these **marvellous** machines" (as they suddenly become).

But whereas we are offered solutions to the problem of erosion, in the form of irrigation projects and new methods of cultivation to conserve the soil, there is no hint of a solution to the problems posed by the machine: and what we remember of the film is therefore not promise but bitterness. Perhaps such a solution, being of necessity political, could hardly be offered in a film made for a government department. But perhaps, on the other hand, Flaherty saw no real hope.

"Industrial Britain" reveals in quite a different aspect the place of the machine in Flaherty's work. I had the interesting experience of seeing this for the first time shortly after reading Orwell's **"Road to Wigan Pier";** and the similarities and the divergences were equally striking. Both convey a deep admiration for the working man — for his endurance, his physique and his value to society. But there is nothing in the film of that passionate disgust which Orwell expresses for the conditions under which men have to work and live in our present-day industrial centres. It is not even that Flaherty omits to show us the slums and the back-to-backs of the Midland town: he shows them as part of a landscape of gaunt Promethean beauty. (This they undoubtedly are; but one wonders how much consolation this beauty is to the people who have to live in them. And to divorce visual experiences from the part they are likely to play in people's lives is to descend into the picturesque.) Moreover, the major portion of **"Industrial Britain"** is concerned to show that the industry of the machine age is still dependent upon the skill of the individual; and the minority group of highly skilled workers are seen as the inheritors of the traditions of mediaeval craftsmanship, without any suggestion that the pressures under which they work are totally different.

Of course, **"Every Day Except Christmas"** has been criticized on similar grounds, for omitting all reference to the personal animosities, the discontents and the political awareness and militancy of the Covent Garden porters. And to a large extent the same defence is valid: that the film is an idealization showing the essential dignity of work (in this case skilled work in particular) and the valuable place which it could occupy in the lives of men if our society were not so organized as to deny this essential dignity. In point of fact **"Industrial Britain"** seems closer to **"Every Day"** than do most documentaries of the '30s, since it tends to value men for their own sakes rather than merely for their social utility.

But is this the whole story? Obviously there can be no strict line of demarcation between the legitimate omission of irrelevancies and the avoidance by a film of problems raised within it; and where we draw the line will

depend on the values to which we are already predisposed. But when bleak rows of Midland dwellings are accompanied by the words, "so these industrial towns are not quite so drab as they seem, for behind all the smoke beautiful things are being made" it is clear that idealization is getting out of hand — that the elements juxtaposed will no longer, on any reasonable terms, fuse into a coherent experience. Beautiful things **are** being made in the heat and grime of the furnaces; and no doubt this fact brings a pride and warmth into the lives of the people who make them: but we know perfectly well that "these industrial towns" are a good deal **more** drab than they seem to the cameraman with a good eye for composition. What is attempted here is a reverse movement from the abstracted ideal to the concrete circumstances in the hope thereby of extenuating them. But too many other factors intervene in our minds — factors bearing on people's view of their environment — and the poetic connection fails.

Returning to the film as a whole, we find that its structure is weakened by precisely the same failing as we have examined here in a point of detail: two strands of meaning are interwoven, but do not ultimately coalesce. On the one hand there is a celebration of work in general — particularly in heavy industry — emphasizing both its vital function in society and the vigour and dignity of the workers themselves. This emerges mainly in the early section dealing with coal-miners — their muscles rippling under the black dust as they wield their picks, or push the laden trucks from the coalface — and in the later section devoted to the steel-works. On the other hand there is a celebration of those specifically craftsmanly virtues on which, to some extent admittedly, the industry of our time still depends. Here we have a close and reverent study of the potter "working exactly as the Greek potters worked" and the glass-blowers who "might be Venetian glass-masters of the 16th century," together with men balancing turbine blades and checking for flaws in steel castings. (These shots recall the village weavers and basket-makers with which the film opens.) When we return to the steel-works treatment becomes almost abstract, as we follow a colossal machine-part through the various stages of its manufacture. But we are reminded that a skilled hand on a lever is guiding it at every turn — and that British pre-eminence in engineering rests upon the tradition of fine craftsmanship which we all share.

The desired implication is obvious: all workers are craftsmen; and if this fact is obscured in our industrial age it is only because the creative process has been spread out, and the individual is separated from the end-product of his labours. The mission of documentary, in Grierson's view, was to bridge just this kind of social gap — to put man in touch with the complex of modern society so that he might understand it any thereby regain his sense of responsibility and of participation. But the truth is that under our present system a man is alienated from his work not only by his remoteness from its end-product but also — and primarily — by the dynamic of the social motivations in which he is enmeshed. This dynamic, springing from the contractual nature of relations between men, governs the individual's innermost attitude towards his work: for this work must be done not for its own sake, nor for the sake of society, but for the weekly wage-packet and the employers' profits. This is substantially true even where the work retains elements of the ancient crafts; but it is wholly true where it does not: thus in **"Industrial Britain"** the reverse movement from the values of pure craftsmanship to the circumstances of day-to-day living cannot hope to

convince. We are confronted here by a limitation of Grierson's whole programme when set within capitalism. But it is nevertheless curious to see his concept of "education for citizenship" providing Flaherty with the perfect vehicle for an evasion of the realities of our time.

Judged on its own merits, then, **"Industrial Britain"** has qualities which make it a worthwhile and important film. But in the context of the director's total output its placid acceptance of social iniquities and its emphasis upon village craftsmanship as the basis of modern industry take on a deeper significance. In most of Flatherty's films he shows us the life of man in relation to the earth, to nature, to his means of subsistence. In **"Man of Aran"** he re-introduced the long-extinct practice of shark-fishing — not to add extraneous dramatic interest, and not for the benefit of the box-office, but to epitomize the ever-present drama of man's battle against the sea. And here, perhaps, we have an explanation of the difference in attitude between **"The Land"** and **"Industrial Britain":** for in **"The Land"** it was this very relation — between man and the soil — which was being disrupted by mechanization; and the vagrant poverty of the dispossessed made the conflict impossible to ignore. But it is characteristic of modern life that man does **not** live in direct relation to his means of subsistence; and this, a basic element in the problems of our time, Flaherty fails to acknowledge.

III

His reluctance to deal with problems other than those involved in winning sustenance from the earth or the sea extends, further, to a complete disinterest in the threat of change. **"Tabu"** is commonly regarded as a potential masterpiece wrecked by the intervention of Murnau's studio mind; but this film, convention-ridden though it is, at least has the guts to explore a theme which Flaherty always showed a marked unwillingness to tackle — the instability of values caused by the impact upon a simple culture of a more complex one. The film tells of the love of Matahi and Reri, a Polynesian boy and girl, and how this love is threatend when Reri is chosen by the priest as "virgin of the Islands" and hence becomes "tabu" — promised to the gods and forbidden to men. The young pair find the opportunity to escape to another island, where Matahi obtains work as a pearl-diver: but since they have never learned to make calculation curb their primitive generosity, they are unable to come to grips with the money system, and soon fall badly in debt. They have chosen to defy the tabu of their tribe, and have sought refuge in the world of the European where such traditions count for nothing; yet they are not equiped for the peculiar conflicts of commercial society: and they find themselves abandoned between the two. In an attempt to recover their security Matahi infringes another tabu — this time one with a rational basis — and dives for pearl at a particularly dangerous point in the shark-infested waters. Again he succeeds. But he returns to his hut only to find that the priest Hitu has, in his absence, persuaded Reri to go back with him to her people and her

gods. Matahi swims after their boat; but his strength finally fails him, and he drowns.

It has been objected that the conception of a strong personal attachment between individuals is alien to Polynesian culture, and represents the imposition of Western motives for the sake of plot. But surely such a conception of human relations is one of the very ideals which might be assimilated from contact with European social patterns. Throughout the film we see the tragedy of people torn apart between a culture which they can no longer wholly accept and another to which they cannot yet adapt themselves; and this has its bitter complement in the attitude of the white governors who are concerned, in the interests of peace and social stability, to support and honour the local traditions which their very presence is all the time undermining. The final irony is that to Hitu and Reri it must seem that Matahi, at the moment of his death, has indeed fallen victim to the tribal nemesis.

The authorship of **"Tabu"** is in some dispute. The general claim seems to be that the story was adapted by Flaherty from a simple Tahitian legend and was then further elaborated — and Europeanized — by Murnau. But even if this is true the gap between the finished film and anything that could possibly have been a Tahitian legend leaves no hope of disentangling the respective contributions of the two men. Richard Griffith, on the other hand, almost reverses the theory by saying that Flaherty wanted to show the "true story of Tahiti" — the white man's exploitation of the native — and that Murnau turned to the legend of the tabu as the basis for an essentially European drama: though here again it is implied that Tahitian life in its purity is what Flaherty really valued. If one could establish that Flaherty was responsible for the aspects of the narrative which we have been discussing it would place quite a new complexion upon his work. But perhaps it is significant that his admirers consider this fine film unworthy of him.

One does not blame Flaherty for the morality of **"Elephant Boy"**, where the Indian's highest ambition is to serve his white overlords well, and the threat of change is viewed from a position of safe superiority. His original story underwent great modification (notably a veer towards Kipling) during the making of the film; and the bulk of the dialogue scenes were shot by Zoltan Korda at Denham. Flaherty's recognisable contribution consisted in the excellent jungle photography — the serenity of the elephants in their natural surroundings, their panic in the stockade, and little Toomai very much at home among them: so that his part in the finished work falls into place with **"Nanook"**, **"Moana"** and **"Man of Aran"** — films where the potentiality of cultures other than those under review is studiously ignored.

Nevertheless something does emerge, obliquely, from **"Elephant Boy"**. The fatherly affection with which Toomai (Sabu) is directed reminds us that a young boy has played an important part — often a central part — in every one of Flaherty's major films, and that great stress has been placed upon the family as the hub of life. Moana's little brother helps him pick coconuts; Nanook teaches his son to hunt with toy animals carved out of snow; Alexander Latour receives a new rifle from his father at the end of **"Louisiana Story"**; and the Child of Aran, who fishes from the high cliffs, waits anxiously with his mother for his father's return. The only unhappy child among them is Toomai: and he is an orphan. Since close family unity is not characteristic of all primitive societies, and is characteristic of some societies which are not primitive, this theme must be considered an

independent one in Flaherty's work — perhaps as important as his affirmation of the primitive virtues, but not identifiable with it. Yet to the broader question of change it is relevant: for it is in the young, and in their attitudes to their elders, that the conflicts of a society are most sharply registered, since they respond to new conditions with a directness from which their parents, through mental habit and through the persistence of out-dated concepts, are debarred. Flaherty's emphasis on family harmony serves not only to define his world as one in which no change threatens, but also to posit as a value a state in which no change, involving a rift between generations, is necessary of justified.

It is in **"Louisiana Story"**, however, that the avoidance of the theme of change is most acutely noticeable. This film deals wth the irruption into the quiet bayou country of a great oil-drilling rig and its attendant crew, and with the impression created by this upon Alexander — a superstitious Cajun boy whose family live by hunting and fishing in the locality. Here there is no hint of conflict between the life-pattern of the Cajuns and that of the oil-men. The two meet on terms of mutual respect (after a preliminary uneasiness), exchange gifts of experience, and go their separate ways. It may be true that under the circumstances portrayed in the film the expansion of industry held no immediate threat for the Cajun community; but few artists could have held the two life-patterns side by side without betraying an awareness of their ultimate irreconcilability (if only in an attempt to deny it). And one would have expected the neo-Rousseauist, of all people, to be conscious of what industry had done to the ways of life he so much admired.

But this is not all. Not only does the film fail to imply antagonism between the rival patterns of life: it actually goes out of its way to suggest that there is no difference between them. This becomes apparent when we compare the treatment of two incidents — Alexander's life-and-death struggle with an alligator he has tried to capture, and the gas blow which temporarily halts work on the oil rig. These provide the two climaxes of the film, being the points of maximum tension. In both cases a nervy cutting heightens the sense of physical fear as man is nearly swamped by the slimy ferocity of nature. And in both cases the final resolution — the successful killing of the alligator and the drilling of a new shaft which reaches oil — takes place off screen, being announced merely by a newspaper headline and by a brief display of the alligator's skin. Thus there is a tight parallelism between the handling of these two events: and nothing is done to suggest that they are not events of the same order. Throughout the film the oil-men and their work are seen consistently — and with alarming conviction — through the eyes of the Cajun boy. And when they depart he is left believing that his little rites with the frog and the bag of salt have been responsible for the success of the second drilling.

But, it will be argued, **"Louisiana Story"** has merits unrelated to any such issues; and to consider it in "social" terms is to be wilfully obtuse: for its overriding quality is its magic — the sheer magic of place. True, many sequences have a breathtaking tranquility of rhythm that makes them unforgettable. Yet even this magic does not remain unaffected by the above reservations — does not, that is to say, retain quite the quality it possesses for those who accept uncritically the film's outlook. For "place" only exists in so far as it has meaning for **people** — representing itself in the perspective of their needs, wishes or possibilities. And in a medium such as the film, which is poetic in structure, a weakness in the whole will always

reflect back upon the part. This is clearly exemplified in **"Man of Aran"**, where critics disagree on the success of the storm scenes as storm scenes according to the extent to which they are prepared to take the film's man-versus-the-elements philosophy seriously. Thus Graham Greene, having pointed out that the film makes no attempt to portray a way of life truthfully, says, "how meaningless [is] that magnificent photography of storm after storm." "Magnificent photography" here takes on a pejorative flavour from "meaningless", the implication being that one is conscious of technical beauty rather than of the impact of reality: for a storm is many things besides magnificent, especially when one has to brave it in a tiny curragh.

IV

It is curiously difficult to gain a critical purchase on such films as **"Nanook"** and **"Man of Aran"**: and this very difficulty is significant. These works have a perfection of their own; yet it is a perfection which seems to look inwards upon itself, and to offer us little. Both show the primaeval hardships of man in circumstances where merely to survive is heroic. Somehow we feel they are quarantined from reality — even, perhaps, the reality of the worlds they portray. Yet since they are perfect, who can say what is missing?

In a B.B.C. talk in 1949 Robert Flaherty said:

"I often think of the Eskimo after a long journey, starving and with not even oil for his lamp, coming to the white man's store full of bacon and salt beef and tins of food and tons of flour, and yet the white man will not give him anything unless he has skins. That is something the Eskimo cannot understand."

This paragraph, though offered in its context only as a wry sidelight on life in the North, contains the germ of something totally absent in "Nanook": for here the attitudes of the Eskimos are being used — on however elementary a level — to call into question the ethic of commercial society.

This is not to argue that any such direct contrast should have been made in the film. Clearly if the contrast is valid it can be made as well externally as internally. But what is important is that the film seems to offer no foothold for such considerations, and to contain the germ of nothing outside itself. I remember seeing **"Nanook"** for the first time, and being struck by the friendliness and hospitality of the Eskimos. But questions began at once to crowd in: was it a comradeliness born of shared hardship, or was it just a practical necessity under these conditions of life? — what were the pressures of family and social relations? — to what extent **could** the struggle for survival have been carried out on a competitive basis? In other words, what were the points of resemblance and difference between Eskimo and European society; and in what sense could their values be translated into terms of our own? Nothing was to be drawn from the Eskimo's adjustment to life, because we did not know the circumstances under which it

had been arrived at: and the great values of friendship and hospitality slipped away into emptiness. I left the cinema feeling amazed that Eskimos were humanly possible, yet had an odd sense of not knowing what to do about it. Nanook's world remained behind, suspended in isolation.

How is this quality of isolated perfection achieved? The process is seen at its clearest in **"Man of Aran".** The early reels show us many striking details of life on the island, and seem to set the stage for a more penetrating insight. In one sequence for example, we see the preparation of plots in which a scant harvest of potatoes will be grown. First the furrows are built from rocks laboriously broken; then seaweed is gathered and laid in the furrows to bind the soil; and finally the soil itself is collected — scooped into sacks like gold dust — from any fissures and crannies in which it has lodged. Such details give us the basic pattern of life — the relation of man to his livelihood in this remote community. But when this is firmly established, and we are expecting a fuller presentation of the way in which these circumstances affect the community and the attitudes of its members towards their lives and towards each other, we are given the shark-hunt — a vast climax of raging seas in which the previous elements, instead of providing a basis for an understanding of the life of Aran, are gathered together into one symbolic battle: man in the face of annihilation. The famous images of people against the skyline express this same symbolism on the level of the individual shot. All milieu is eradicated. A similar treatment is discernible in **"Nanook";** though here the culminating symbolism is more dispersed over the film as a whole. Even **"Nanook",** however, ends with its night blizzard — matting with snow the fur of the sleeping dogs.

Flaherty's insistence upon the virtues of the primitive life implies a dissatisfaction with present-day society; yet this dissatisfaction never emerges as an attitude **towards** the society with which he is dissatisfied. (Conversely, since his representations of primitive society fail to establish a relevance to the life of our own times, they fail equally to express, in terms meaningful to us, real attitude towards the societies he portrays.) When forced to deal with the intrusion of modern industry and commerce upon the patterns of simpler cultures he obscures at all points those aspects in which the two modes of life radically differ, and takes refuge either in evasion of the real conflicts **("Industrial Britain"** and **"Louisiana Story")** or in ambiguity **("The Land").** Far from expressing hostility towards "civilization", he simply behaves as if it did not exist; and his only answer to the dissatisfactions of modern life is an appeal to those very values which modern society renders meaningless — craftsmanship and bravery. Thus also family unity, as a value unqualified by circumstances, is irrelevant to us in so far as family disunity is a sympton of conflict within our society, and is even pernicious in so far as conflict between generations is itself the **agent** of change which is desirable if our situation is to be rectified. And if Flaherty's discovery of the need for social groupings **("The Land")** remains stillborn despite the example of communal living among the Eskimos this is for two reasons: firstly that the communality of the Eskimos is expressed within an economy fundamentally different from our own; and secondly that by inflating this value to the symbolic level he has dissolved all basis from which a comparison might have been made.

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Flaherty's adherents will say that he has shown us the essential Man. And indeed, this fallacy of the "essential Man" seems to offer the only coherent explanation of his films. He was concerned with human nature in general rather than with any specific manifestation of it; and he seems to have believed that Man's true nature was represented at its clearest in the primitive life, shorn of the complexities of the modern world. Yet what is human nature beyond the sum of the solutions which humanity has found for the various problems which have confronted it? And there is no reason to think that the problems of primitive man are more fundamental than those of civilization: they are simply different.

It might be argued, from an extremist standpoint, that Flaherty does not deal with problems at all, but only with dangers and difficulties — "adventure" — encountered in a stable world. But this argument is of no consequence. What Flaherty shows us of a primitive culture constitutes an adjustment to life: and such an adjustment can be called the solution to a problem, even though the solution is age-old and engrained in the pattern of living, and the problem is posed in the simplest terms — fight nature or starve. What is significant, though, is that all other conceivable problems —moral, social, personal—have been jettisoned in that process of simplification, the suppression of supposed irrelevancies, by which Flaherty seeks to arrive at his essential Man.

Of course, simplification is always entailed in that proces of selection by which an artist draws a pattern from the chaos of reality and through the pattern he chooses, refers us to a system of values. And we have seen that in **"Industrial Britain"** a narrow selection of non-typical elements from our society is nevertheless able to reveal values significant to this society. But in the other films it is a way of life remote from our experience which is subjected to this extreme simplification. There is a two-fold loss of contact: and the result is a sense of the distortion of human truth. It is impossible to believe, for example, that anyone could be stricken with appendicities or cholera in Flaherty's Samoa.

Values, after all, are an abstraction — a convenient way of designating those general choices or assessments of worth which human actions seem to imply or towards which they seem to be directed. In the last analysis an individual action refers to nothing beyond itself; and the further a man's situation is removed from our own, the less direct significance his actions will have for us. This Flaherty did not acknowledge. To him, for example, courage was courage, the same in all human circumstances—even if it took a half-wild Cajun boy to see it that way. By making his films about people whose problems were not, even by analogy, our own, and by isolating these problems from all the complexities and irrelevancies which might have given the people a human wholeness, he made it impossible for these films to reveal to us any values whatsoever.

For in the last resort it is not Man who has to come to terms with his situation: it is **men.** And each of Flaherty's films tells us something about particular men acting in the face of specific historical and social conditions and conditioning. By trying to disguise this fact Flaherty succeeded not in revealing something timeless and essential, but in obscuring that very significance which a man's action takes on **because** of its relation to the

totality of his environment. And it is dobtful whether — except perhaps in **"Moana"** — we are told anything we can possibly **use** in coming to an understanding with our own situation.

And even **"Moana"** is marred by the attempt at universality. Maybe it is useful to known that self-inflicted suffering in the midst of plenty can be ennobling, and that men can feel the need of such a gesture; but this is still only one of many possible solutions to a problem which is not ours. The influence of missionaries has in fact led to a decline in the practice of tattooing, thus proving that the Samoans can do without it to a greater or lesser degree of spiritual detriment. (To **what** degree, one wonders?) The choice of solution remains one's own; and in the film the comparison between possible solutions is not drawn. The value of **"Moana"** is impaired by the fact that its message is delivered in **general,** as an exhortation not to sacrifice one's humanity by taking the easy way out (as Flaherty, to his credit, never did). There is no suggestion that a problem confronts the individual: that it might be easier for a man to accept the tattoo than to face the social humiliation of refusing; or, if at one time no question of refusal ever arose, that the prospect and experience and meaning of the tattoo would vary according to whether a man regarded it with indifference or with terror. The force of the film might even have been greater if we had been told that Ta'avale, who played the part of the young man, hesitated for some time before agreeing to go through with the ceremony.

I said earlier that we are made to love the people of **"Moana"**; and this might seem sufficient justification for the film. But, except in so far as the slight element of free choice gives to these people a humanity lacking in Flaherty's other works, our love for them is an experience as remote from the contacts of real living as is our love for Donald Duck.

It is instructive to compare Flaherty's work with **"Grass"**, a documentary made in 1925 by Schoedsack and Cooper. This remarkably straightforward film shows the adversities regularly overcome by the Baktyari tribe of North-West Persia in their huge migration to the grass-lands. The underlying philosophy is much the same as Flaherty's. But the film is conceived on the epic scale, and thus avoids those paradoxes which result from using the individual as a symbol for mankind.

Flaherty tries to show us Man isolated from the irrelevant, but instead shows us men almost isolated from circumstances. In seeking the essential he has reduced himself to stating values so generalized as to be meaningless, eliminating all elements which make a human situation specific and unique, and hence failing to recognize even the distinction between a culture in ferment and a culture in rest. Thus Flaherty, rebelling against the pattern of life in our society, fails to accept the implications of his own rebellion; and his basic Man, retaining few traces of common humanity, inhabits a vacuum world of ultimate generalisms.

DAI VAUGHAN

Interview with Truffaut

Fernando Lopes: 'Nouvelle Vague' is linked in the public's mind with Cahiers du Cinema. Do you think that "Cahiers du Cinema" has managed to influence the new French Cinema, or is "Le Nouvelle Vague" just a label invented by the press?

François Truffaut: Yes, I agree that "Le Nouvelle Vague" is a fictitious name invented by journalists to describe a group of young directors who have made their debut in feature film production during the past year. But it is also true that within the 'Nouvelle Vague' there is in fact a group — if you can call it a group — of directors who began their career writing criticism for **Cahiers du Cinema.** But this group only accounts for about half or even a third of Nouvelle Vague and the only link within this group is that we know each other well i.e. we are familiar with each other views but do not necessarily share them.

Fernando Lopes: Yes, I believe you once said that the only thing you all have in common is a liking for American slot machines! However, you do seem to have a common attitude to some problems of the French Cinema, especially the so called 'film of quality'.

Françis Truffaut: Yes, I agree. We have a common attitude at least as regards the problems of production. We believe in a new way of making films, but I think, that you also have in mind the esthetics. Although we have turned our backs on the old French Cinema, that does not mean to say that we condemn all of it. We dislike the theatricality of it. Perhaps 'theatricality' is not the best word, because **'Hiroshima mon Amour'** contains much that is essentially theatre; but this is good theatre; the others are not.

Fernando Lopes: We have now seen a good many of the Nouvelle Vague films. Is it possible to define any tendencies within it, and do you think that any of them will influence the future development of the cinema?

F.T. I think that some influences can already be felt. First we had to make an impression on the people in the Industry and I am pleased to say that **Les Amants, Le Beau Serge, Les Cousins, Hiroshima mon Amour, Orfeu Negro** and **Quatre Cents Coups** are going very strong at the box office. So now producers accept young people from outside the Industry and even prefer them not to have had any experience in film making in the Industry. The trouble is that they are just playing a sort of blind man's buff, and it is clear that if there are many failures in the next few years the pattern will change again. But for the moment the important thing is that about 15—20 young artists, who were anxious to make films, have had an opportunity to do so; and even if the situation does become less favourable I believe that they will still go on making films.

With regard to the influence of the Nouvelle Vague, I don't believe that my film will influence anyone, and that goes for Chabrol too. **Hiroshima mon Amour** is the only one of these films likely to influence future trends because Resnais revises the rules of narration and shows clearly that we can make a feature film almost without a story or time unity, but composed of moods, impressions, sensations. We don't have to be chained to any conventions or conceptions.

François Truffaut receiving his award from Celia Johnson at the London Film Festival

F.L. Do you think your background as a film critic helped or hindered you when you became a director?

F.T. It helped me to see what I did not want in my film. But there is a danger in fact, that having seen three to four thousand films everything I did seemed a repetition.

F.L. How about criticisms of your films?

F.T. I haven't read many. I think I have got all of them but it would be very tiresome to read them all, as they all seem rather similar: you know — relating the story etc; and one is tempted to weight it — I hope I don't sound too cynical — and conclude that 8 kilos of criticism is not bad for one film. My wife reads them and lets me read those that seem to have something interesting to say.

F.L. In what way can a serious film magazine or an intelligent critic like Andre Bazin influence the Cinema, or at least film makers themselves.

F.T. I must make a distinction: Andre Bazin was probably the best European film critic and therefore a special case.

The young critics of **Cahiers du Cinema** regarded themselves as potential film makers and only temporary critics. They were serious, passionate and personal about films, and although their immediate influence on the film reading public was not great, other papers and critics had to take note of them. In that way **Cahiers du Cinema** contributed a lot to the change in film criticism, and in the last 10 years has reached the cinema-going public. In this time of crisis, when cinema-going is no longer a habit, the public tends to become more discriminating and responds to honest criticism. Thus an evolution in public taste becomes possible, and this type of prestige criticism can therefore have important repercussions.

F.L. You and your colleagues made your first feature films under difficult economic conditions, outside the framework of the Industry. Your films were successful both artistically and commercially. Having been accepted now by the industry whose methods you have always disliked, do you think you can keep your independence?

F.T. My case is a special one. I can, thanks to the success of **Quatre Cents Coups** make 5 or 6 more features independently. Chabrol, who now makes films for a commercial company, has complete freedom, although his last film, presented at the Venice festival was not a great success. This is important, for Chabrol likes expensive sets, stars and cinemascope. At the same time his own production company finances cheaper films by other young directors. Eric Rohmer, the Editor in Chief of **Cahiers du Cinema,** and Philipe Brocca are directing their first features for his company.

F.L. This may be all right for you and Chabrol but what about the others who are not yet established?

F.T. This is a question of 'rapport de force'. Let me explain. After **Quatre Cents Coups** which had a great commercial success, I had an offer to direct a film called **Striptease.** I was told that I could change the script and shoot it any way I wanted to, with or without stars. When I declined, the Producer called in Jacques Baratier whose **Goha** had been commercially less successful; Baratier was told to accept the script as it was. Baratier refused, and it was offered to another and less successful director. He preferred to shoot the film on location and was told that if that was to be the case he couldn't make the film at all.

If my next film is a commercial failure, my position will change immediately.

F.L. Can you offer any advice to potential film makers in this country?

F.T. Make short films, inexpensive but ambitious. Try to enter them at the international festivals. It is important that the films exist; then they cannot be entirely ignored.

F.L. Will you continue writing criticism for Cahiers du Cinema?

F.T. Yes I will, but less frequently.

F.L. What is your next project?

F.T. I am shooting a film adapted from an American short story. It is called **Tirez sur le Pianiste** and is a portrait of a shy man. We hear his interior voice preparing what phrases he is going to use in the exterior world among other men and women. His ideas are clear and precise, but become confused when he tries to express them — as is the case with me at this moment.

C'est Impossible?

by

DAVID NADEN

In 1913 "The Biograph Magazine" ran an article discussing the possibility of forming a National Film School at Regent Street Polytechnic. It is now 1960 and still no national film school. On the other hand this may be an advantage. We could still form a national film school which would be facing in the right direction, for if one **had** started in 1917, it would probably by now be providing a steady three year course, giving a good basic knowledge of still photography, mathematics, physics and chemistry, together with potted histories of Art and The Drama (but only up to 1910, of course) and a nice thick wad of 'film appreciation'. And the Union would probably be refusing to guarantee Union cards, and the Industry would have even more intellectual clapper boys knocking at the door.

In spite of various public statements to the contrary, one wonders if anyone **does** want a film school (it is interesting to note that L.S.F.T. was started by three people who had little or no connections with the Industry, and the fact that the school is now reasonably established is due to their doggedness and the help of friends in the Industry who were not worried about doing the right thing) The Industry doesn't appear to want a school. It is quite content with the present arbitary in-take of 'tea-boys', and fears that newcomers with some artistic aspirations will make the end product even less predictable. The Union would like a film school that would train its apprentices to a higher technical standard — an admirable wish within its limits, but when is the Union going to consider that other things go into the making of film besides man-hours and technical proficiency?. 'Cadmus', in his monthly article in the A.C.T.T.'s journal, said that we didn't want to make intellectual, long-haired and boring films like the Polish 'The Last Day of Summer' and then went on to say that he had not even seen it. And this attitude isn't only confined to the A.C.T.T.!. The B.F.I. and the like are starting a University Chair in Film, something comparable to Bristol's Dept. of Drama (no comment), but you can't take an academic approach to film-making, such as is usual in British Universities—it's much too exciting . . .

And so the factions go backwards and forwards with great deliberation.

They nearly made it last year with the Regent Street Polytechnic scheme, which had Union support, premises, equipment and a not negligible grant. But again the scheme fell through. The National School of Cinematography must be independent and not just an adjunct to a school of still photography.

At the moment there are plenty of unrealised ideas floating around, so here are a few more just to try and crystalise the issue somewhat. The future school, when it does come, should have a governing body composed of members of the A.C.T.T., the B.F.I., the B.F.P.A., the A.S.F.P., T.V., the Universities and the manufacturers of equipment and stock, who shall be there as advisers **only** to the Principal.

To help him in the running of the school, the Principal should have a small permanent staff of Technician/Teachers and the major part of film discussion

and appreciation should be given by outside lecturers to provide the variation that a small budget wouldn't otherwise allow. But these are just the bare bones. In what way is this school to be run so that it has an effect on film-making in this country? There are examples from various other countries of how film schools could be run. There's Moscow — though that would be comparable to asking the Church of England to form a film school to make bible films in cinemiracle, there's IDHEC in Paris — though the only good ones to come of IDHEC are those that were expelled or left early, there's Centro Sperimentale in Rome — though we haven't heard much about them, and there's P.H.S.F. in Lodz — about whom we've heard a lot. Much should be gleaned from them and adapted for use here.

For the school to give technical knowledge of "how films are made" is insufficient. Any amateur can pick-up this kind of knowledge with six months spare time and a helpful librarian, and there are enough amateurs and dilletantes around as it is, both inside and outside the Industry. It is the driving force of the artist's comment of his society that distinguishes him, and although one cannot teach a person this sense of direction, the possibilities can at least be discussed, facilities for expression given and techniques used in the right way instead of indiscriminately. I hope that this makes the film-maker sound like an artist with his own individual approach, because this is what a film-maker should be. And if you don't, then you have a misconception of what an artist is: and if you think it is impossible because film-making is an industry and not an Art, then the only thing left for you to do is to take to the bottle—the sooner the better.

To be a film maker carries a tremendous responsibility and requires more than a knowledge of lighting, editing, lenses etc. and I would suggest that the new school needs to contain the following aspects:

1. that the school should be run on the lines of a Workshop, students working in small groups on projects (**at least** 50% of the time on practical work) under the guidance of a producer sympathetic to the project, and the supervision of a staff technician.

2. that the first half of the course should be mainly theory, with short practical exercises on set subjects and further practice working as assistants to selected post graduate students, who return to the school to direct their own projects.

3. that the theory should contain lectures on a) painting and sculpture, up to and including contemporary artists and b) sociology

4. that contact should be maintained with manufacturers so that students have pre-knowledge of new techniques and have the opportunity to try them out.

5. that students should have to write the scripts of their projects 'feature or documentary', having spent at least three weeks on the location, preferably longer. How any one can write a script on, say, a football player as a result of a ten minute chat in a pub and not take a superficial attitude. I don't know — but, of course, the results are superficial.

6. — and its not much use the script-writers taking this trouble if its going to be played by some new star from an acting school — all Greek dancing class fresh — and hope to get a realistic performance. So there will have to be an acting school attached. The whole system of training in the theatre

schools which deprives actors of any individual freshness and substitutes a methodical, glossy, West-End theatre accent, posture and attitude, is completely wrong for the cinema (it's wrong for the theatre too). Film work is done in fragments and the actor's emotional response must be more immediate—and sensitive.

7. there should be close contact with students at other film schools, with interchange of visits and films. The world is getting small enough for the problems of film makers in one country to be very similar to those of another.

8. that the duration of the course should be **at least** two years with a further year working as an assistant in the industry.

9. that the school should be an experimental centre and that people who have good ideas but not the technical knowledge could have assistance from the school and the aid of students.

How is this school of cinematography going to fit in with the Industry? Firstly, the industry has to accept the idea, and also to realise that young individual talent is necessary if the industry is to survive. Up to now, the industry has been able to keep going without responsibility, but this opportunity has passed to T.V. (and they've not been slow to take it!) and the system is as good as dead. A new structure will have to take its place, and this depends upon new blood which has had some centre at which to try out its ideas and form its own expression. I sincerely hope that some such centre will be formed soon, and that the controlling body will not be frightened to experiment in a new approach to training. The patient is sick and the cure warrants it. The scheme is possible. It is present in embryo, at the L.S.F.T. and it only requires official support to bring it into early fruition. British films are still the laughing stock of the world and our own cinema going public is starved. It's not only for minority culture appeal the queues form at cinemas showing foreign films, These films provide new experiences and ideas, and also one feels that the audience is respected and not despised.

There is an opportunity and who knows, perhaps the person who wrote in a French film magazine 'The Cinema et l'Angleterre? — C'est impossible!' will be proved wrong. I hope so.

D. H. NADEN

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Vienna Discusssions

by

BOLESLAW SULIK

There are, I believe, about twenty Film Schools in the world to — day. The majority of them are of fairly recent origin, having been set up since the last war; and they represent a truly pioneering effort with no tradition to draw upon. One would expect therefore to find in them a keen interest in what other Film Schools are doing, — a determination to develop contacts, study each other's methods, exchange experiences. It is possible that something of this spirit does exist in Eastern Europe, but in the West there is little sign of it. The vacuum in which The London School of Film Technique seems to exist probably reflects a more general condition.

The only platform I know of for meeting students and teachers from different Film Schools and discussion of common problems is a film seminar held every second year as a part of the World Festival of Youth. Last summer's seminar in Vienna on the subject "The Young Film Artist and the World Today" was a third venture of this sort, and the first to be held this side of „the Iron Curtain". In spite of the easy access to the seminar the representation was somewhat onesided. The Vienna Film Academy was the only Film School from the West to take part in the proceedings officially. The French IDHEC and Italian "Centro Sperimentale", which I understand were represented two years earlier in Moskow, this time decided to stay away. I should add perhaps that my own pilgrimage to Vienna was an entirely private affair and was not sponsored by the London School of Film Technique. There were other people in a similar position, (though some, I suspect, rather less 'private' than myself) anxious to participate in discussions.

The seminar was scheduled to last four days and had to be extended into the fifth. A competition for student and amateur films was incorporated in the programme. The films followed the speakers, the speakers followed the films, and as no attempt was made to limit the scope of discussion the whole thing became a bit chaotic. A pity, because the first day of the seminar seemed to promise a lot. We had a paper on the main theme of the seminar from one Miedviediev, a long, bony, ascetic — looking Russian from the Moscow Film School. It turned out to be a rephrased statement of socialist realism. Its essence is the contention that a socialist artist examining a contemporary scene, observing a contemporary man, should overlook all transient features, pick out and concentrate on the enduring ones. In effect, his characters should possess qualities of 'the Man of the Future' and in a contemporary society he should recognize the pattern of a future socialist one. This sounds interesting enought until one remembers that in a country like the Soviet Union 'future' is a given quantity. In fact, the artist is asked to paint an official, conformist picture of society.

After Miedviediev's paper we had screenings of student films. Some very bad and conventional stuff from the Vienna Film Academy, some well — made but conventional stuff from the Moscow Film School and the Polish "Two Men and a Wardrobe", well known in the West,

which in this context went off like a bomb. The day ended on a note of high excitment and expectancy. But the hoped-for thorough and lively discussion of socialist realism never materialised. The next morning saw an opening attack from the West, represented chiefly by delegates from the German Federal Republic. This constituted part of an attempt to carry the Cold War into the Festival and to win a few points wherever possible. It killed effectively all hopes for a constructive discussion. The seminar became a political battlefield. In this situation the Poles and the Jugoslavs who normally might be expected to provide some sort of a challenge to the old doctrines of socialist realism had to tread very warily indeed. Even so the best of what was to come was a final speech by prof. Jerzy Toeplitz, head of the Polish Film School, who managed to be both diplomatic and full of good sense, and included a plea to grant the artist his right to doubts and conflicts. In his view the future belongs to film makers who can achieve a synthesis between self — expression and a desire to share in building a new and better kind of society.

In short the seminar itself was a failure. The problem of socialist realism, which is not, after all, a question of style, but of the whole relationship between the artist and society was never attacked directly. Luckily, some of the films included in the competition turned out to be pretty eloquent on their own. (The share — out of the awards certainly reflected both the artistic prestige of the schools and the political power of the countries concerned if not the actual merit of the films shown).

The kindest way to treat films from the Vienna Film Academy is to overlook them and this is what I propose to do. This leaves only schools from the countries of the „socialist camp" to consider.

One has to acknowledge a high level of technical competence in films from Soviet schools (Moscow and Tiflis). The photography is good, editing correct, handling of actors — both amateur and professional — amazingly mature. If teaching conventional movie technique is their aim, these Schools do it well. But conventional technique corresponds to conventional ideas; and the officially prescribed optimism of these films, when taken in large doses, leaves one with a strong taste of saccharine sweetness. On the other hand an attempt to experiment with form, while embracing the same conformist ideas ("The Old Oak", from the Tiflis School) resulted in a meaningless, heavily pretentious film. There can be no doubt that in Soviet Union the situation of a film — artist has improved in the last few years and, one hopes, will go on improving, but if these student films are anything to go by, a final breakthrough is still a long way off.

One could say much the same things about films entered by the Prague Film School, except that the Chechs presented at least one interest-in picture: in "Rain Comes from Heaven", an occupation story seen through a child's eyes, the director manages to create an oppressive, genuinely menacing mood.

The Hungarian Film School sent only two films, both interesting: "The Railway Workers", a beautifully controlled little composition, with precise shapes and rythms reminding one of a sonnet and "Ping Pong", a record of a championship table tennis match, another and less successful exercise in rythmical cutting. One should not generalize from only two examples but inevitably a question arises: is this seeking of purely formal values in a realistic subject typical of young Hungarian film — makers?

Certainly the most interesting and varied entry came from Poland. This ranged from a 'one act' war drama "The First One" (directed by J. Rutkiewicz), a bitterly ironic story of the first killing by a new, young soldier, through „Rondo" (directed by J. Majewski a wild, brilliant grotesque; to the pure, naive metaphor of "Two Men and a Wardrobe" and some

straight documentaries. These were bold, intelectually alive films, made by ambitious, young, imaginative artists, where technical competence was a means to an end and not an end in itself. It seems that the Polish School is at the moment unique in having both the advantage of co-operation from a nationalised and developing film industry, committed to accepting the School's graduates, and the climate of true freedom within.

A constructive discussion of these films was not possibile in the seminar itself, but it does not follow that they were not discussed. In little Viennese cafes around Sebastianplatz the exchanges were sharp and direct, the flames of controversy fed with glasses of local wine. International contacts were made; friendships struck, and this — more than what went on in the seminar itself — made the whole venture well worth while.

BOLESLAW SULIK

Blood - Hot and Cold

by

JOHN IRVIN

I refer..... to the Popular Cinema — King Moron the Arse-Licker (let there be no discrimination between stalls and Circle) In the days of King Moron it came to pass that the servant (of public taste) became the Master (of public taste). This is Sam's Revelation, and his pay-packet.

In cold blood a heavy drinker, heavy jaw-types superman defends Law and Order with fancy six-shooters and silver bullets against the Forces of Evil bristling with Emery papered jaws and faces as hard as cheese grates (utility model revolvers for them, though). These two sides fill up their quota of bellies with red-hot lead only Superman outcats the Cat — he has as many lives as pebbles the beach — and that's where he gets his sex. Sam has a celluloid body-guard so dont-say-you-havent-been-warned-because-you-have-see. Somebody dropped a bomb on Hiroshima — what the hell.

Vermin gansters.... B.O. rustlers... delinquents with dirty ears... easy come, easy go Gussies, oh! addicts with twitches... so on and on... they can be brought to the right way of thinking — or shot dead (put these down to expenses so lay off the tranquillisers Sam)

A sample of the Make it Tough and Bottle-neck unoriginal script to see how it works

249 Joeboy to Warder: Give me the keys
250 Warder: You'll never get away with this Joeboy
251 Joeboy: Don't tempt me Mac
Warder: Don't expect me to give in because I won't
252 C.U. Joeboy: He asked for it, Boxer
253 Joeboy: I'll count to fire and then... one-two-three-four
254 Warder:No... No..
255,6,7,8,9, Boxer beats up Warder
270 Joeboy: don't kill him
271 Boxer stops
272 Joeboy: Now the keys or I shoot. No more chances.
273 Warder: It'll make a noise
274 Joeboy: Don't make me do anything I might regret.

Warder breaks down and gives Joeboy the Keys. Joeboy lets himself and the other out of jailhouse. Shoots Warder in the back and makes a noise.

The safety belt police 'get' them all in the end ten green bottle-like.

Stars and stipes — hoorah!

The never changing script for the Simple Simon audience is distributed with laxative regularity. Some say that's the reason why. It cleans them out,

gives them a new start — it sublimates them. Red hot cinders expurgating-no. It does not take away the sins of the world — cannot wash away the sin of wanting. Wanting terribly to dip their pens into the boss's eye-wells (if they're clerks) or stamp on the guv'ners groin with a pneumatic hammer (if he is a labourer) — impossible that cinemascopic punch bag violence should wash away this sin of wanting; rather it masturbates this craving — it cuddles, ovens, and makers blood and the temperature rise.

In the script that I have written and it is typical of Roonyism, it is deficient of any real human feeling. Sure, there is the blood-not in Joeboy and gallant effort in the Warder and a helping of bestial and protective feelings for suc-suck audience but these are all phoney-baloney. Bestiality is put in the gas-chamber and Protection is put to church. The film dares the wide-eyes and then double crosses them with; "it doesn't pay". There are no feelings of doubt, funk, impulse description — no nothing. Pollute your audience Sam, loot your audience Ars gratia.

To give away a sample of the love-romantic-sex film would be ludicrous. Simply "I love you" with tea room orchestration. (Brahms for Malle). No silence, no inhibition, no sweat, no anxiety, no mistakes, no hiccups. no beauty — just pleasure (sex is pleasant in a parlour game way). This is so much so that I wonder if sex is what it really is — hot blood. They make it nice in tepid water. Take your hands of Pilate. It makes me sick. Is it the truthful expression of sick world? I'm sick of it all the same. King Moron (Sam... whoever you are you stink of JUSTIFICATION, you justify till your heart's content. All your ideals for happy family capitalism and sales-talk democracy you justify, glory-orgify. You admit no evil — or if you do you pass a lousy buck. ("I want to live") Hot Blood And Sex: King Moron doesn't have a sex-life — he prefers Romance. This is the female's idyll angle — flowers and long distance telephone calls, Europe and railway stations, glycerine tears and Christmas. Leave sex to the French they at least describe sex from a male point of view which is much more honest: nothing like the washable rubber feelings of the American Sweetheart (Sweetmeat and cheesecake) It doesn't make a nice picture.

I am not knifing the physical world and baptising a day-into-night spirituality — that wouldn't be cinema. I want a human violence: leap-frog fear, jumping over and run away; Fear with scuts—like a rabbit's heart throb, iris-blind panic. I want to smell fear on the screen like wet pants without the "smellies". And belligerence that recoils like artillery and is unprofessional, ungentlemanly. That is nearer the truth. Sex that is instantaneous, momentous, painful, cowardly. dangerous, inspired for a moment — so let's away with jig-jog-nig-nog routines, drills and formations. Let's have individualism and the physical pure. "Ashes and Diamonds" pioneered some of this country it showed the emergence of the spirit after the physical and so did "Farewells" but they were too involved in the cause of their effects. Leave causes to TV. intelectuals and panel games.

Before the cause let's ensure that the effects are perfectly human. Let's drop Hollywood dead.

Two By Two

Int. put no props-no associations with everydayness or the regalia of a cup and saucer existence. Simply, light and darkness. There is no tic-tock time nor any enclosure of space. Camera speed 30 frames per sec. The reason for this is that gives greater elegance and freedom in movement and disquiets the audience, who cannot recognise the dailiness nor the obvious slow motion effect in the physical movement of the action. It is unknown to them. Audience participation is not a feeding time for the Lions, it is feeling, as the action feels, it is not a hopped up feeling FOR the action. In this instance, in any case.

1. C.S. Andrew in profile — turns to three quarter, fusing his laughter — full face and his laughter explodes. Track out.

2. C.S. Sal enters frame laughing; stops and becomes frightened, covers her eyes, hears a movement and tries to catch it and exits laughing. Track out, and enter Andrew breathless, pretends he doesn't know where she is, yawns and shrugs in one and exits on tip-toe.

3. Crane up on Sal, sitting and perplexed. A shadow and she reaches for it desperately.

4. He spins. Track in.

5. She jumps up. Track out.

6. Track in. Sal falls to ground. As Andrew comes in, she does a hedgehog on him. He kneels down beside her and kisses her out of it.

7. Track out. As he lies down beside her. Sal kisses Andrew. Fade out.

It will be noted that each shot contains a camera movement. The rythm of their game is related emotionally to the camera.

Cut to Exit. A brick and concrete alley, complete with milk bottles and toffee paper. A cul des sac with the open end framing the transactions of human interest, fruit stalls and poodles.

The recording of this is left solely to the cameraman. He sees the action and reports and incorportes himself to it (As though it were a news item).

The action (backed by the noises of every street and the holler of vendors);

Two men Rubber and Bingo walking in the cul de sac. Bingo is reading a magazine, looking for a particular page. He finds it and shows it to Rubber who seems indifferent. He suddenly snatches the magazine away from Bingo running and waving the magazine above his head straight into the cul de sac. Bingo runs after him and tackles him. They lie on the wet concrete thumping and scratching each other. Cut to int.

14. Track in to Sal and Andrew who are making love. Track ceases as they suddenly stiffen and turn over.

(When this was filmed there was no rehearsal or predefined action. Everything was instant, nervous, slightly inhibited and momentary suddenly inspired and real.)

Cut of Ext.

Bingo is sitting on Rubber's chest strangling him. Rubber smashes his fists into Bingo's face. Bingo jumps about like a shot rabbit, squealing (cut noise of streets). He uncovers his face punching like a madam, without aim. Rubber trips Bingo, and breaks a milk bottle and advances. Bingo rolls under a nearby car gibbering and squeaking.

Cut to Int.

22. Sal screams and as she does so knocks Andrew's nose.

23. Andrews nose bleeds a little and tears irrigate his cheeks. His face expresses no physical pain —only wonder and ignorance.

24. Sals hand covers his nose and she kisses out his tears, track out and fade out, the end.

When a soldier (of the Queen) kills the enemy and surgeon struggles to save life, anybody's there is in that situation on that battlefield a bewildering IRONY.

This film wonders and describes Man who can shed tears and blood on the same day; of woman who senses the pointlessness of her creation but continues with hope.

In hope we would like the commercial cinema to change but would not offer my own film as a criterion, it is only an element in a large constituency.

JOHN IRVIN

This is the script of a film being made by John Irvin in the course of his studies at the London School of Film Technique.

Two Lost Generations?

Thouehts about Audiences

by

ARNOLD WESKER

There are two legitimate ways an audience can respond to any work of art—or entertainment, if we must make the distinction. They can either say to themselves (and of course they never "say it" to themselves, it is just the way they behave) they can either say "I will let this work present itself to me, I will let it say what it is or has to say or do"; or they say "well, I know all about life and people and we'll see if this measures up ty my ideas". In other words people come to a work either open minded or prejudiced.

In the theatre an audience can sometimes remould a play simply by responding with their own conceptions of the actions or personalities they are watching. To quote an example from my own play **"Roots":** I had a scene where a character takes a bath in a tin bath. They were country people, and this seemed to me a way of conveying a truthful picture of their way of life. I made no comment on it in the play; I simply allowed this incident to be taken for granted. But some audiences chose to laugh at the appearance of this bath, and anyone sitting in the audience who had been prepared to take. it for granted is quite likely to have thought that I — the author — meant to make a laughing stock of the people who use tin baths. And indeed, after a while, a cast can come to anticipate the way an audience will take a line or scene and just play it that way whether intended or no.

This kind of audience reaction is inevitable therefore. The point is made. But there is a new kind of audience reaction that has arisen which is not inevitable or natural but is in fact unnatural, psychological and rather frightening. It is the reaction of a new generation of young people who are cynical and untouchable by any sort of emotion displayed on the screen, whether it is a passionate or tender love scene, an emotional upheaval or a moment of pity. The cries of disbelief and "mickey-taking" which rightly greet the inanities of most horror, western and sob films are carried indiscriminately over into the film that has honesty and real feeling. Everything is "sent up", nothing is believed, nothing accepted. What is out there on the screen has somehow become, for this audience, a challenge to it, something it must cry down in order to retain its own personality. This is the audience that Jimmy Porter refers to as the "Sunday night yobs in the front row". They bring nothing and they take nothing. In the world of art and entertainment these youngsters have rejected everything —except perhaps rock'n roll or even jazz.

But are they in fact "yobs"? Two questions arise. Whose fault is it, and what can be done? The first question I can answer, the second I cannot. I think, without any doubt, the fault must be laid at the feet of the film industry themselves. This industry, due to its very nature, has

evolved with such a rush and, due to the people who were responsible for it, with such a desire to capture markets and expand at any cost, that it has cut its own throat. Films have been turned out and hurled at audiences with such sensationalism and ballyhoo, such publicity and make-believe, that audiences have become numbed and bamboozled. Each saga has been mightier than the one before until now no one believes it anymore. This is what has happened on the one hand. On the other hand the content of the films has been so purile and unrealistic that audiences have rarely been able to match up what they have seen with the reality they know. It is my belief that, in turning away weekly from the fantasies of the celluloid to the eleven o'clock realities of the local back streets, a whole chain of frustrations has been built over the years; just as I believe the same has been done when, each Sunday morning, the community wakes up to find it has not won £75,000 on the football pools. Secretly the knowledge is held by most people that nothing is within their reach. Can these then be called "yobs" who reject everything?

I am saying, simply, that as a result of producing dishonest films the film industry has created an audience that is just too punch drunk to care. In this light I am wondering whether we can consider films like **"Room at the Top"** and **"Look Back in Anger"** as breakthroughs. They may be an artistic breakthroughs within the political framework of the film industry, but has it not come too late? A new barrier to communication has arisen—an anarchistic audience. A thick-skinned collection of office boys in Wardour Street may now be convinced that this kind of film is worthwhile, but now we have the new task of breaking through to the now audience.

Which brings me to the second question. How is this breakthrough to be made. I cannot answer this, but the reason why I cannot answer may be of some use. I do not know how because this is a problem of psychology, and psychology is a process of experimentation, or of trial and error. The film maker must continually be asking himself—can this be easily sent up? How ambiguous is that or how ludicrous the other? On the other hand I can quite easily understand the argument against this because the film maker would develop a sort of "artist's twitch" in his style; he would constantly be looking over his shoulder asking: "Who's laughing at me now?".

Of course we really do know the answer don't we? It is a long term one and we must have the courage to say that a whole generation, maybe two, are lost, just lost to us—sacrificed to the "lust of the movie moghuls of yore"; and that we must think of the generation to come who must surely be gentler, more receptive and compassionate, and that the films must be **about** them, **for** them and perhaps even **with** them in the way **"Bicycle Thieves"** was and **"Every Day Except Christmas"** and **"We Are the Lambeth Boys"** and **"Pather Panchali"** and **"Salt of the Earth"**. Isn't this so?

ARNOLD WESKER

IN OUR SECOND ISSUE, WHICH SHOULD APPEAR IN APRIL, WE SHALL CONCENTRATE ATTENTION UPON THE STRUCTURE OF THE FILM INDUSTRY HERE & ABROAD.

THE LONDON FILM GROUP

Why are we starting a film society in the centre of London, where the cinema flourishes more than enywhere else in the country? Partly because of, partly despite the opportunities which the commercial cinemas offer. In London it is possible to see a great many films; but it is not always easy to see them in any coherent pattern, and there are few facilities for discussion. The emphasis is on seeing, and in the bulk of commercial cinemas, on passive, uncritical seeing.

The London Film Group is being started primarily to counter these pressures on audiences to be passive and uncritical. We shall show films in series, each series dealing with a particular theme, with special meetings set aside for discussion. We hope that this will stimulate critical analysis, and help to break down the barriers between film-makers, critics and audiences. We shall try to avoid in our programmes any of the narrow approaches, whether aesthetic, historical, or national, which tend to place the cinema in a self-contained world. Instead each series will be built round a theme which is relevant to life outside the cinema. Thus, the first series will be made up of films about war; subsequent themes will be youth, colour, the hero, sex, work, power and authority. We hope also to revalue the work or particular directors and movements—British documentary and Ealing Studios are two which we have in mind. Finally, there is the possibility of forming a film production group at a latter date.

PROGRAMME 1 JANUARY–FEBRUARY 1960

WAR

January 10	The Underdog *Germany*, 1953	6 p.m. and 8.15 p.m.
17	Duped Till Doomsday *Germany*, 1956	6 p.m. and 8.15 p.m.
24	The Captive Heart *England*, 1946	6 p.m. and 8.15 p.m.
31	*Discussion*	7.30 p.m.
February 7	The Unknown Soldier *Finland*, 1956	6 p.m. and 8.30 p.m.
14	The Burmese Harp *Japan*, 1956	6 p.m. and 8.15 p.m.
21	Hill 24 Doesn't Answer *Israel*, 1955	6 p.m. and 8.15 p.m.
28	*Discussion*	7.30 p.m.

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LONDON SCHOOL OF FILM TECHNQUE

COURSES FOR 1960

Basic Course

A general grounding in the technique and art of film-making is related with the production of two ten-minutes films, one shot largely outdoors using 16 mm. cameras and one shot in the studio using 35 mm. cameras. Specialization at this stage is discouraged and students can only obtain a certificate if their work in all departaments and in the final examination reaches the required standard. Lectures and demonstrations are given by Producers, Directors, Cameramen, Editors and other technicians actually working in the Film Industry.

Next courses commence: March 14th, 1960, May 16th, 1960, September 12th, 1960.

Extension Course

These are usually limited to students who have successfully passed the Basic course certificate. Selected groups make their own films, each student specializing in one aspect of film making. Work in progress and finished productions are encouraged, judged and criticized by working film technicians.

Evening Courses provide a streamlined version of the Basic course for people unable to attend by day.

New Special Evening Course for people already in the Film Industry and in exceptional cases for successful graduates of the Basic or Evening courses, will be run according to demand.

★

Each course is limited to twelve students. Minimum education standard required:—Five passes at 'O' level in G.C.E. or equivalent examination. All prospective students must complete an application form and those resident in the United Kingdom will also be required to attend for an interview.

★

Details from the Secretary

THE LONDON SCHOOL of FILM TECHNIQUE

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